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BELIEFS AND PRACTICES RELATING TO BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD AMONG THE GALICIAN UKRAINIANS

I. Pregnancy and Birth

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Pregnancy, to the Ukrainian peasant, is a phenomenon surrounded by mysterious forces which, if offended in any way, are sure to bring misfortune upon the expectant mother and her unborn child. A pregnant woman is treated with consideration, and is usually showered with wishes for an easy confinement. A person mistreating an expectant mother exposes himself and his household to harm.[1] In the belief that labour pains, especially acute ones, are not inevitable but are caused by evil powers,

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[1] *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, by G. R. Owst, Cambridge, 1933. P. 99. Reinfelden's Moralization is in MS. Egerton 2419.

[1] Kaindl, R. F., *Die Huzulen: Ihr Leben, ihre Sitten, und ihre Volksüberlieferung* (Wien, 1894), p. 4.

843 784 789 the Ukrainian peasant woman keeps her pregnancy as secret as possible. The Devil and persons with supernatural powers will thus be kept in ignorance and, consequently, be prevented from interfering in any way with her accouchement.[2] The expectant mother therefore avoids mentioning her condition to any one except the midwife. A husband, for the same reason, dislikes to speak of his wife's pregnancy.[3] Some women, especially among the mountaineers (*hutzuls*), even wind about themselves a broad strip of woollen bandage, in order to hide their condition. So tightly is the bandage wrapped that it has a definite effect upon the child, which is usually very small at birth; in order to assure its normal development the midwife, upon delivering it, exclaims: "Now grow!"[4]

[847] A child is, as a rule, a welcome addition to the family. Hence an enceinte woman, legitimately married, rarely attempts abortion or infanticide.[5] On the contrary, she is greatly concerned to give birth to a healthy child, and in order to assure herself of this, she cautiously watches nearly every step she takes and strictly observes a variety of taboos. The precautions and taboos, both before and after birth, are based in most cases on the belief that things or actions produce similar results. In other words, certain objects that the pregnant woman may see or touch, certain foods that she may eat, and certain phenomena that she may observe, hear, or feel, will register a corresponding effect upon her child. Wherever, therefore, the consequences are obviously undesirable, a pregnant woman tries to avoid doing or observing the thing in question, or, if this is impossible, to guard against them by certain means which are usually imitative in nature. A few examples follow.

[13] [2] Kolberg, O., *Pokucie: Obraz Etnograficzny* (4 vols., Kraków, 1882–1889), i, 208.

[3] *Idem.*

[4] Szuchiewicz, W., *Huculszczyzna* (4 vols., Lwów, 1902–1908), ii, 2.

[5] Unmarried girls, on the other hand, very often take steps to dispose of their unborn children. Cf. Koenig, S., "Marriage and the Family among the Galician Ukrainians," in *Studies in the Science of Society*, G. P. Murdock (Editor) (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1937), pp. 302–303.

843 If a pregnant woman looks fixedly at a person, or for that
784 matter if he stares at her, her child will be pretty or the reverse,
789 depending on that person's appearance. She therefore tries not to look at or be seen by an ugly individual.[6] She also avoids looking at a fisherman, lest her child will have a restless nature.[7] Neither must she watch a horse shaking its head, or her child will be constantly subject to similar behaviour.[8] If, on the other hand, she happens to see a galloping steed, her pregnancy will last twelve months.[9] Upon observing a mouse, an expectant mother must spit and touch her abdomen; otherwise her child will be born with a mark resembling a mouse on its body. A fire in the village may have a similar effect; if a woman is frightened by it and does not spit immediately, her unborn child will have the mark of a flame on its body. Should a pregnant woman eat an apple at the approach of her confinement, warts are likely to appear on the face of her child;[10] and if the apple be a stolen one, the child will grow up to be a thief.[11]

843 Definite signs enable one to predict the sex of an unborn child. If the prospective mother eats her meals with a good appetite, for example, it is a sign that she will have a boy; otherwise her child will be a girl. According to another indication, if the woman is to have a boy large spots appear on her face before her confinement, but if her face remains smooth and white
844 she is sure to have a girl.[12] The destiny of the child, and even
777 of the parents, can be foretold from certain omens. If birth
787 occurs around noon the child is destined to be unfortunate, while a baby born at daybreak will be lucky.[13] The crowing of a cock during birth is a bad omen. The birth of twins presages disaster, *e.g.*, the imminent death of one of the parents or the

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[6] Kolessa, J., "Narodziny i chrzciny, wesele i pogrzeb u ludu ruskiego," *Zbiór Wiadomości do Antropologii Krajowej*, xii (Kraków, 1889) 117; Kaindl, *Die Huzulen*, p. 4.

[7] Kaindl, *ibid.*, p. 4.

[8] Kolessa, in *Zbiór Wiad. do Antr. Kraj.*, xiii, 117.

[9] Kaindl, *Die Huzulen*, p. 4.

[10] Szuchiewicz, *op. cit.*, ii, 1.

[11] Kaindl, *Die Huzulen*, p. 4.

[12] Kolberg, *Pokucie*, iii, 174.

[13] Kaindl, *Die Huzulen*, p. 4.

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844 impoverishment and consequent ruin of the homestead.[14] Ac-
777 cording to another version, the birth of twins or triplets is a
787 general punishment from God.[15] Since eating two potatoes, two apples, or two plums would result in her having twins, a pregnant woman is most careful to abstain therefrom.[16] A child born before the ninth month indicates that the woman has been unfaithful to her husband.[17]

843 The Ukrainian peasant woman, as a rule, goes about her daily
844 tasks uninterruptedly until the very onset of labour pains. The mountainee. woman in particular, owing to her robustness, seems to give birth with an unusual ease and unconcern. Besides attending to her routine work in the house, she is occupied at a period very close to her confinement with such work as milking cows, constructing fences, and pitching hay. Only a woman who is constitutionally weak takes to bed when she feels that her accouchement is not far off. Others often deliver their babies wherever they happen to be at the time—in the barn milking, in the field, or anywhere else. Sometimes a woman goes up to the attic, and after a few moments hands her baby down to someone below and then climbs down after it.[18] Women have even been known to return from market with a newborn baby in their arms and a sack full of purchased articles on their backs. In order to avoid leaving blood spots behind her in case she delivers her baby outside of the home, a woman who expects to give birth at any moment often puts on a pair of men's trousers under her dress when leaving the house.

844 Birth itself is surrounded by a mass of practices, again mostly imitative in nature, which are concerned rather with the well-being of the infant than with preserving the health of the mother.[19] When the hour of confinement arrives the husband repairs to call the midwife (*baba*), who is usually a woman with

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[14] Kolessa, J., "Ludowy wiruwania na pidhirju," *Etnograficznyj Zbirnyk*, v (Lwów, 1898), 83.

[15] Kaindl, *Die Huzulen*, p. 5.

[16] Kolessa, in *Etnograficznyj Zbirnyk*, v, 83.

[17] Kaindl, *Die Huzulen*, p. 4. [18] Szuchiewicz, *op. cit.*, ii, 2.

[19] Vowk, C., *Studii z Ukrainskoi Etnografii ta Antropologii* (Praha, n.d.), p. 188.